

# Employer Branding: Employees and HRM Brand ambassadors

**Abstract:** *Organizations are becoming conscious towards the practice of Employer Branding. Organizations have observed that with the help of Employer Branding, the best talent can be attracted, retained and motivated from the market. Employer branding is a HR marketing strategy which communicates the goodwill or reputation of the organization to current and prospective employees, stakeholders and their clients. This practice reflects the all complete employment experience about the organization with the arrival of gruelling competition between the organization to attract and hire the best talent and work with them, provide wow factor to the existing and potential customers, the concept of employer branding becomes an aspect of supreme importance. Today's HR professionals spending their time trying to understand that, how can make their organization unique from the other organizations as well develop a sense among the existing and prospective employees that it is a Great Place to Work.*



Dr. Tulasi Vidyasagar  
General Manager - HR,  
The Sirpur Paper Mills Ltd.

## 1. Introduction

In the time of Liberalization, Privatization and Globalization (LPG), organizations are experiencing cut throat competition for their existence and sustenance. This is forcing organizations to be more innovative and proactive into their business operations, thus, brand promotion plays a vital role in creating sustenance and having competitive edge into their operations. According to the conventional system, branding is for external communication which aims to influence potential and prospective customers. But, this approach of branding is too narrow, especially; when a company desire to frame effective business strategy its employees should also be motivated for successful implementation of marketing plans. In the era of turbulence, organizations are compelled to change the need, preferences, taste, trend, competition strategies changing according to their customers and competitors. This requires consistent and effective brand communication to their employees for better understanding of promotional goals and customer satisfaction.

Employees, being an integral part of brand promotion are playing a crucial role in the organisation; hence, companies are concentrating equally on their employees for displaying company's brand image in front of the customers.

Today, where employees are become tools for fighting against competition, organization understood the significance of employees' involvement in the fulfilment of company's commitment. For example, company in its promotion activity commit the customers for quick delivery, maintaining neat & clean environment, quick response and maintaining quality & service, but, if company overlook internal marketing for its internal customers i.e. its workforce, probably company would not be able fulfil the commitment as said because it's their employees who make the commitment into action in the actual market. Researches revealed that employees are the key factors for delivering promises thus it conceptualized the fact No Talent -No Brand. Therefore, employees' talent should be explored and utilized to build a brand.

According to the American Marketing Association (AMA), the brand is a name, term, sign, symbol, or design, or a combination of them intended to identify the goods and services of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of competitors. Brand is a name in every consumer's mind and it is characterized by a noticeable name or symbol which can differentiate the products and services from the rivals'. An effective brand creates confidence among the

employees to work with and facilitate an efficient tool to fight against the competitor's brand. A good brand establishes confidence among the customers regarding product performance and quality assurance. A brand makes the product relevant and meaningful for the target customers. It enhances the product over and above the basic generic level. Brand differentiates the product or company in the marketplace with its unique visual cues. It defines and defends market positioning and space.

A strong brand effectively managed and executed, will deliver significantly better returns to shareholders than a weaker brand. Strong brands typically add 3 to 5 percent to an organization's value, while weaker brands can actually destroy value to the order of percent. To have value, a brand needs to be associated with good companies, appropriate markets and quality products and to be leveraged through effective marketing. Strong brands are a key driver of shareholder value creation. The three most important concerns to businesses during a downturn are controlling costs, pressure on prices, and retaining customers. Brands can play a crucial role in confusing and less confident for consumers. It will rise above competitive price wars, sustaining a premium as competitors throw their margins away.

## 2. Brand Image.

Brand image can be defined as a unique set of attributes in customers' mind concerning to a brand stand for the implied promise a brand makes. It is the sum of all tangible and non-tangible benefits a brand offers. According to Hsieh, Pan, and Setiono (2004), a successful brand image enables customers to identify the needs that the brand satisfies and to differentiate the brand from its competitors, and consequently increases the likelihood that customers will purchase the brand. Brand image, on the other hand, is the totality of customers' perceptions about the brand, or how they see it, which may not coincide with the brand identity.

Brand image is considered as an impression in customers' mind whether real or imaginary or both which create overall personality of the brand in the form of perceived value. Building a brand image is not overnight job but it is a process which works over time. Organizations spend lot of resources in terms of finance, efforts, time and so on to build up a brand which can be placed as synonymous of a product into particular category. For example, Nirma has built up its image as synonymous of detergent powder through its positioning strategy (Nirma made segment redefinition through its low priced strategy). Similarly, Colgate has achieved a renowned image in dental care products. Hence, it is a set of belief held about a specific brand.

The idea behind brand image of a brand is that the customer is not buying just a product or service, but also the image associated with that product or service. Brand image should be positive in a true sense, unique among the competitors' brands and instant to give need satisfaction. Brand images can be strengthened using brand communications like advertising, packaging, word of mouth publicity, other promotional tools, etc. Brand image contributes a lot to convey the brand's character in a unique manner to create distinction from its competitor's image. The brand image consists of various associations in consumers' mind-tangibles, non-tangibles, benefits and attributes. Tangibles consist of the physical attributes of a brand where as non-tangibles stand for assurance, surety, confidence etc.

## 3. Human Resource Build Branding

When we think about branding, human resources (HR) is likely not the first thought that comes to mind. Instead, envision slick advertising campaigns and instantly identifiable logos that inherently promise value, quality, and a desirable image or personality. The world's most successful brands, names such as Google, Coca-Cola, and Apple emerge brands that have transcended their category of product or service to become icons. But if we look closely, these brands have another commonality. They consistently top annual "Best Places to Work" lists. In addition to brand recognition, they have a strong company culture and highly engaged employees.

A corporate brand is the sum total of several initiatives. It encompasses organization's philosophy, culture, and approach to business as well as its reputation among its customers. A brand is reflected not just by the belief system of the top management but by each and every cog in the establishment's wheel. Human Resource Managers are merely tools for ensuring a good flow of talent into the company, and have little bearing on the brand. However, a closer look at the interconnected aspects of branding will prove that Human Resource Managers are key to the organization's branding. They not only ensure compliance with labor laws and employment ethics, but also make sure that people in the organization are in sync with the brand image and value of the establishment and also reflect it externally.

A brand is the identity of a company in the eyes of its customers. To put it more precisely, it's the promise that customers associate with the experience, value and quality of the services extended by the organization. If the promise is not delivered to the customers each and every time, the brand image suffers. Richard Branson, the founder of Virgin Group, famously said organizations should look after their employees, who in turn will automatically look after the customers and maintain the brand value. This is why the role of Human Resource Managers is important and key to the brand image.

By being the vanguard of an organization's culture, by moulding the environment of the organization, by instilling the right values in new employees and bringing them in sync with the organization's core values and beliefs, HR professionals determine the continuity of the organization's brand at every level. In this manner, they also act as brand ambassadors

of the company they represent. More precisely, they ensure that each employee becomes a brand ambassador of the organization.

Competitive pressure in today's business environment has catapulted the HR department from an administrative overhead to the fountainhead of innovative solutions to cultivate and nurture talent, and act as the conduit between the top management and the ground level executors. This is how the core philosophy of brand flows from top to bottom internally.

Learning about the standards and trends prevalent in the industry is the key HR solutions provider as it helps organizations keep pace with the changing needs of time. For example, companies today are adopting employee friendly measures such as flexible timings, work from home options, paternity leaves and longer paid maternity leaves to make working more amenable and happy experience for employees. Organizations that take lead in adopting such friendly measures will automatically rank higher on employee preference and will have better retention results. Happy employee translates into the most suitable brand ambassador of an organization as he/she act as an influencer in the industry and persuades more talented individuals to join the organization.

HR managers are marketers and know how to market their organization to potential talent. Their role is crucial in explaining their company's work culture and benefits to prospective candidates. It's also crucial in retaining experienced candidates as they seek job security. Hence, the importance of retention, particularly of quality talent is key to maintaining the organization's brand value.

Processes HR Managers act as Marketers.

The role of HR managers is important in building an organization's brand. But, apart from dealing with employees and trying to keep them happy on a day-to-day basis, they should ensure that his organization is talked about well in professional and industry circles.

Some of such processes can be:

- Each individual has a social network comprising people of different domains. Today, this social network is not only limited to the people we meet and talk to regularly, but also extends to the social media online. Through this network, HR managers can work in a systematic way to ensure that they are





reaching out to people and spreading good word about their organization. For example, if they talk about an interesting pro-employee policy initiated by his organization, it will certainly ring a good bell among his network and help spread it beyond.

- HR professional networks comprising people from the industry who usually keep a close tab on what is happening across organizations. HR managers consciously participate in these networks can make a lot of difference to his organization's image. Participation can happen at both formal and informal forums. Whether there is an opportunity to present a paper, debate an issue or participate as a speaker at an industry conclave, HR managers should leverage these opportunities to increase their organization's visibility.
- The entire sourcing or recruitment process is another key area where HR Managers can help generate goodwill for the organization. How he/she manage and complete the entire process and how he/she treat the candidates who have entered the fray can make a lot of difference. In every recruitment process there will be candidates who are selected, and others who are rejected. How HR team treat the candidates who have not made it through the selection process is a key indicator of an organization's moral fabric and culture. The recruitment process should make even the rejected candidates happy so that they go out and talk well about the organization.
- Normally, an organization's association with an employee lasts as long as the two are together. But, how he/she treat the ex-employees and how he/she keep them engaged is another indicator of the organization's goodwill in the professional circuit. Organisations can keep in touch

with ex-employees through alumni networks or newsletter, and maintain a constant association with them. Each individual has a clout or influence in spreading a good word for the organization.

#### 4. Employer Branding

When a job seeker begins his/her search, one of the first things is going to Google is this "Top companies to work for in 2020" or, alternatively, "Top companies in X industry." It makes sense, nowadays, a company's reputation matters more than ever. In fact, 86% of workers would not apply for, or continue to work for, a company that has a bad reputation with former employees, or the general public. Ultimately, organisation spends plenty of time creating a compelling, incentivizing brand story surrounding your products or services. But cultivating a powerful employer branding ensures attraction and retention of top talent. At its most basic, an employer brand is organisation reputation as a place to work, as well as employees' perception on an employer. In other words, employer branding is how company market to job seekers, as well as internal employees. The better you are at employer branding, the more likely you are to attract top talent. Additionally, a positive employer brand can also help you retain top talent.

Employer branding is critical to organisation bottom-line. A good employer brand can reduce turnover rates by 28% and cuts cost of per hire by half. Additionally, candidates who apply for roles are 50% more qualified when the company has a good employer brand. Ultimately, an employer brand can help organisation greatly reduce recruitment and hiring costs, while ensuring higher morale and more productivity among employees. Plus, organisations have an employer brand whether organisation put effort behind it or not.

Employer branding is the application of marketing, communications and branding concepts to

promises of an employment experience that make an organization distinctive and appealing to new and existing employees, and ensuring that employees identify and engage with the organization, its corporate brand, mission, values and beliefs and thrive with it. Having a strong employer brand is like the organization's charismatic personality. Who you are draws others to you. If we consider employees as customers and 'employment experience' as the 'product' being offered for their consideration and purchase the 'customer satisfaction' would then reflect the 'strength' of the employer branding. Similar to the product branding, which creates a lasting image in the mind of consumers about the organization's products for quality and service, Employer branding creates an 'image' of the employer among employees for its employment. Organizations with higher involvement in employer branding are generally well managed organizations where employees are motivated, continually learning and growing. Strong employer brand has a magnetic effect when it comes to attracting and retaining talent.

Following are prominent methods for employer brand building Process. A Typical employer branding objectives could be:

- enhance the company's appeal to attract talent
- create alignment of employees to org mission and objectives
- convey the role and importance of the organizational mission
- position the company's brand amongst employees and improve its brand equity
- benchmark the organisation for best practices

**Some of the initiatives organisations can take-up to leverage company brand image.**

##### i) Know your company's unique value proposition.

To create a powerful employer brand, it's important to focus on company's mission statement, values, vision, and culture. It could be helpful to identify what are company business needs are, and then work backwards to understand what type of talent you need to acquire to fulfil those objectives.

Mission Statement defines the organisations purpose and primary objective. Its prime function is internal to define the key measures of the organisation's success and its prime audience is the leadership team and stockholders.

Vision statement also defines the organisations purpose, but more so in terms of the organisation's values rather than bottom line measures (values are

guiding beliefs about how things should be done). The vision statement communicates both the purpose and values of the organisation. For employees, it gives direction about how they are expected to behave and inspires them to give their best. Shared with customers, it shapes customers understanding of why they should work with the organisation.

#### ii) Conduct an employer brand audit

Organisations might not be fully aware of the reputation of own company has among job seekers or even own employees. To take-up internal surveys, conduct social media searches or hire a firm that administers reputation monitoring. Ultimately, this survey research should uncover own employees' favourite aspects of company culture that organisation can focus on highlighting, as well as any areas for improvement to ensure a strong employer brand.

#### iii) Write an employer value proposition

A survey is to be done, to get a feedback on organisation cultivated a list of values and benefits the company offers, what are the areas organisation should focus to create an employer value proposition. An employer value proposition is a marketing message and a promise, so organisation shouldn't say anything that isn't true, or that your employees wouldn't agree with. Company can use employer value proposition on company website, recruitment materials, or LinkedIn company newsletter, page. Additionally, organisation employer value proposition is something HR team can discuss with potential candidates. Organisation value proposition should have nothing to do with compensation. Instead, company should evoke passion in potential candidates by expressing company's positive impact on the world, or deeper purpose.

For instance, Accenture, a global management consulting and professional services firm, created this employer value proposition, which they've displayed prominently on their Careers page "Help build the future. Be yourself, make a difference. Work where you're inspired to explore your passions, where your talents are nurtured and cultivated. Innovate with leading-edge technologies on some of the coolest projects you can imagine. And get the tools you need to keep learning and growing so you stay continually ahead of the game while making a difference in the world."

#### iv) Leverage current employees

When job seekers want to learn more about prospective employer brand, they would like to hear from and see that company employee's feedback. Organisations should leverage own

employees by conducting employee interviews or testimonials to share on company website. Companies can also encourage employees to post on their social media accounts when your company does a fun giveaway, a woman in Tech event and holding panel discussions, employee of the year etc, such events pictures can be posted on Instagram or Facebook with a hashtag etc. This is a fun yet powerful way for own employees to share your company's culture with their own networks.

#### V) Cultivate a strong on boarding process

According to an infographic by O.C. Tanner, 69% of employees are more likely to stay with a company for at least three years after a great on boarding experience. Ultimately, instilling a positive company brand image starts with a good on boarding process. It's crucial to organisation to get employees engaged and excited about their roles, and their teams, from the start. By arming new employees with the instructions and tools necessary to excel in their roles, organisations needs to ensure a smooth transition, lower turnover rates, and more productive teams.

A first impression of the company on potential employees goes a long way in building your brand. The same is true with employees. During the first few weeks of on boarding a new job it is imperative to exceed expectations. For example- employees spend a substantial amount of time engaged in new hire and benefits induction related to the organization during their first week of work. This is particularly true when procedures are inconsistent with the organization's approach to other aspects of the joining process. A dissociated on boarding process leads to unhappy hires.

#### vi) Offer learning and development opportunities

As per a research, in the top 5 reasons employees left their jobs was because they were bored, and needed a new challenge jobs. Ultimately, this should be a relatively easy fix. If company allow employees to pursue learning opportunities and become proficient in new skills, demonstrating your company's emphasis on continuous learning and improvement. And by challenging employees, ensuring they won't get bored in their roles, which could lead to higher retention rates. Plus, as they develop new skills, they become more valuable employees for the company. A win, win.

#### vii) Communicate through video, blog posts, photos, and slideshows to tell company story

When organisation implementing a new strategy, initiatives or a success story to improve the

market's perception of company product or service, don't just communicate this message through a circular of letter as one channel. Instead, provide videos, photos, slideshows, blogs, and other forms of messaging to ensure you're reaching the largest audience on whichever platform they want to be found. Similarly, it's important to use high-quality videos, photos, and text to tell company story.

#### viii) Employee Participation in seminars or conferences and sharing success stories, initiatives and achievements

Its important company should encourage employees to participate in the seminars or conferences to showcase the success stores innovative ideas, a stronger workplace culture, and better customer service. This helps knowledge enhancement, network development and ensuring extended employer branding to new groups of people.

### 5. Employee Branding

"An unsatisfied customer tells ten people about his experience while an unsatisfied employee tells a hundred." Employee branding is the image projected by employees through their behaviors, attitudes and actions. This image is impacted on by employees' attitude and engagement towards the employer brand image promoted through the culture of the organisation. As employees become more important to the brand building process, companies need to give focus on these activities. The role of employees in brand building is therefore increasingly important (Aurang, et al., 2005). According to Rao (2009), the employee brand is an image of the organization presented to an organization's customers and other relevant stakeholders by its employees. And in the employee branding process, the employee starts talking the employer brand and simply put, becomes a brand ambassador for the employer.

Employee branding is targeted to the existing workforce, but employer branding by highlighting that the organization is an employer of choice reinforces the employee branding message to the existing workforce. Nonetheless, it is important to note that the two activities have a different emphasis. The difference between employer branding and employee branding is as depicted in Table I.

Best employees represent the strength and ability of the organization to fulfil the commitment with desired quality. Employee branding shapes employees' behaviour so that they project the brand identity of their organization's products



through their routine work behaviour. Employee branding is intended to induce employee-brand identification, a psychological connection between the employee and the brand. Employee branding is the process through which employees adopt the organizational culture and how the culture influence employees in achieving the brand image. It is a process of training employees and making them understand their responsibilities and duties with proper motivational factors to reach and build good

brand image of the organization in front of the customers.

The employee branding process enables the organization to consistently deliver its desired brand image to customers, thereby solidifying a clear position in the minds of customers and employees alike. If this process executed efficiently, it would automatically provide a competitive edge to the organization. Employee branding has achieved a great acceptance by many

community-related events. (8) They recommend the brand to friends. (9) They defend the brand from criticism. (10) They also encourage other employees to focus on the brand (versus focusing on internal politics or other negative company behaviours). (11) They also publically display their association with the brand (e.g., on T-shirts, branded gear, tattoos, etc.). Beyond contributing to employee morale, these outcomes should also reduce employee acquisition and retention costs and enhance employee and knowledge retention.

**Table 1: Employer branding vs Employee branding.**

Area of employer and employee branding	Employer branding	Employee branding
Direction of branding activities	External and Internal	Internal
Branded Equity	The organisation	The employee
Target of branding	Current and Potential employees	Customers who interact with branding employees
HR Activities	Recruitment and selection External and Internal Communication Benchmarking practices.	Employee engagement, T&D, Performance Management Competency based HR Systems Internal communication
Aim	To ensure the company attracts new recruits of quality and existing employees	To ensure employees act on 'brand' and share the values of the organization's brand.
Intended Outcomes	Winning the war for talent High motivated and high performing work force having the competitive edge.	Increased employee engagement, commitment and identification Increased customer satisfaction and loyalty

organisations as a strategic tool in this competitive arena. Hence, it has become a matter of discussion as a source of strategic advantage to the companies.

To manage employee brand image, an organization must send frequent and consistent messages to the employee to keep them updated and motivated and let them feel that they are the integral part of the organization in brand building and other business operations. Through these messages organizations try to build an equitable understanding among the employees that what behaviour is appropriate and what responses is suitable in various situations to fulfil the need of employee branding processes.

The consistent messaging towards employees make them understands what behaviour they must obtain to achieve the objectives of this strategy. Consistency in throwing frequent messages develops employee's psychological ability to better understand the strategic intent of the organization and use this to deliver his best to the customers.

Employee has got a significant place in positioning the organization's brand image along with the other modes of positioning. Many organizations have successfully achieved the intent of creating positive image, competitive advantage largely due to efficiently and effectively positioning the image in to the customers' mind.

### Employees as Brand Champions

When employees admire the brand, they show following pro-brand employee behaviours, including employee brand-loyalty. (1) Want to work for the brand and are loathe leaving it. (2) They have a sense of ownership in the brand, takes personal responsibility for its achievement and success. (3) They are more forgiving of organizational mistakes. (4) they are vigilant about competitor actions deemed threatening to the brand. (5) they are strong and authentic brand champions. (6) They go beyond their prescribed roles for the well-being of customers and the brand. (7) They participate in various brand

### Conclusion

As in marketing, brands seek to be chosen by customers. So the branding is an activity that is aimed at increasing the probability of being chosen by customers. The same lies with the concept of employer branding. In order to reach this goal, an employer must understand what its employees seek for. The human resource department has to advertise its activities and create a brand image in a way identical to the marketing of a product. For branding the HR is to perceive and acknowledge the needs of its employees. The changes in the market scenario bring about changes in the employee perceptions. It is the task of the HR to recognise the needs and formulate the policies of the company well before in advance.

A highly satisfied work force creates the best brand image for the HR. For HR branding, the HR is to identify the customer needs and perceptions regarding the functioning of the human resources and work for a better relationship. If there are differences in the employee and customer perceptions the HR is to take measures to nullify or minimise them to avoid the loss of business.

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